THE NEWS LETTER

OF THE COLLEGE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

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Meditations on Motion Pictures, Etc.

I am one of those fortunate souls who have the joy of teaching Shakespeare—and of getting paid for it. That, in the language of Mrs. Malaprop, is the very pineapple of professorial pleasure. Yet, alas, this pleasure is not unalloyed. Most of my students have never had the opportunity to see a Shakespearean play on the stage, and hence they try to study a play in the same way they read a novel. In my efforts to make them realize the play's the thing, I resort to many devices: I use phonograph recordings; I myself play Falstaff and Desdemona with equal facility before them; I wave my arms and strut across the classroom, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing to poor innocents whose only knowledge of the bard comes from the printed page.

In hearty accord with Joseph Jones' recent argument (in the **News Letter**) for greater use of visual aids in the teaching of English, I hereby enter a plea for concerted post-war action by the C. E. A. to secure motion picture versions of some of Shakespeare's plays in 16 mm. versions. Our film library has prints of the ancient silent versions of **Hamlet, Othello,** and **King Lear.** From the point of view of the development of moving pictures, changes in styles of acting, and somewhat caustic humor on the part of professor and students, these antiques serve some purpose in the study of Shakespeare, even with "Three Blind Mice" dubbed in as the musical accompaniment for the scenes of Gloucester's sightless gropings. Such items seem to be the only visual aids available for the study of Shakespeare. So far as I know, not even the Hollywooden **Romeo and Juliet** or Mr. Cagney's **Midsummer Night's Dream** or the English **As You Like It** can yet be obtained in 16 mm. prints.

Shortly before the outbreak of the war, the New York **Times** announced that Hollywood was about to begin production on several of Shakespeare's plays with the minimum of setting and fanfare but with "adequate" casts. This would be a consummation devoutly to be wished.

Devoutly to be wished, that is, by those who believe that the study of Shakespeare is not like reading a novel (or-Save the Mark!—a study of linguistics), but should be an effort to visualize the action and characters on a stage. Of course, according to many recent critics (including some traitors in our own ranks), there just aren't any English teachers with any feeling for the life that is in literature. We teachers of English are so dead that our superiors are violating a city ordinance in leaving us unburied. In general, so our pre-burial obituaries state, we died when we began working on the Ph. D. degree, and hence can never bring to our students any real feeling for literature, dramatic or otherwise. Where, I ask (with another bow to Mrs. Malaprop), are these putrefactions? Experience as a student and a teacher in eight different colleges and universities has convinced me that English teaching is fully as good as that of any other subject, usually better.

Even granting, though, that we English teachers are all dead and don't know it, would not three or four good moving picture versions of Shakespeare breathe a breath of life into us and our work? If CEA will push this project after the war, maybe some of us corpses can remain out of mother earth a few years longer.

W. B. Gates,
Texas Technological College.

Regional Meeting in New York

A regional meeting of CEA will be held on April 21 at the Faculty Club of Columbia University, in conjunction with the spring meeting of the New York Council of College Teachers of English. The two organizations will combine at a luncheon at which Professor Ernest Hunter Wright, Chairman of the Department of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia, will be the host. Luncheon speakers will include Mr. Max J. Herzberg, a former president of the National Council, and others selected by the New York Council; for CEA the speaker will be Professor Gay Allen, working on a Rockefeller fellowship, upon a book on Walt Whitman as an international figure. All speeches will relate in some degree to the theme selected by the New York Council, —American Literature in its relation to world literature.

CEA members in attendance will assemble at 10 A. M., in a room to be announced later, and act upon an invitation from the New York Council to join them at 10:30 in their morning conference on Comparative Literature and the Post-War World. In case of acceptance, the CEA panel discussion will follow the luncheon; its topic will be "Academic Training Recommended for Those Who Will Teach Undergraduate English in the Post-War College." The charge for the luncheon will be $1.60.

The report of the CEA Treasurer, Professor Jess Jackson, revealed a cash balance on hand, at the close of the fiscal and calendar year, of $828.20, with all bills paid. Since that date the balance has improved. Recommendations from the membership are in order as to the number and nature of future periodical publications. Suggestions are also in order as to the appropriate use of any royalties accruing to CEA from the book "Freedom Speaks".

Report of the Nominating Committee

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(The retiring President to serve as a Director for three years, according to precedent.)

All members in good standing are urged to signify by postcard ballot to the Secretary their approval or disapproval of this slate. To scratch the ballot, it is necessary only to strike out any name or names, and write in the space below, the substituted names.

More About Sanity In Poetry

"The League for Sanity in Poetry" was accorded a place on the program of the Fifth Annual Writers' Conference at Evanston last July. Unfortunately I could not be present at the session where it was introduced and discussed, I understand, with some heat; but I have heard some of the repercussions.

For the most part I agree with our Editor's views, and at present I have no intention of joining the League, but the editorial makes me want to take issue with some of its conclusions. They do not recognize what seems to me to be very important: that frequently a writer achieves fame, or at least a vogue, through the patronage of influential persons and media. It is not merely a matter of gradually growing up until one is so tall that all around may see. Of all the verse written, or that might be written, the public has access only to what the editors, anthologists, and critics admit. Readers can take it or let it alone, to be sure, but suppose they find nothing in it, let it alone, and go away sad and hungry for lack of the lift and sustenance that great poetry should in every age provide?

Not many of them individually will analyze their feelings enough to realize what is the matter, and they might not think of anything to do about it if they did. Of course, in theory they could always write to the editors. In an age when the popular political remedy (I don't subscribe to it, still hoping that as a rule our elected representatives are better informed than we and as genuinely solicitous for the common welfare) for all that ails one is to write, and urge others to write, to one's Senator or Representative, must readers "sit idly by" while fumbling versifiers and poseurs are accorded most of the space still available for poetry? No, but individually they would do little about it; told what is the matter, they might.

I admit that I am mostly posing any hypothetical case. My own students would testify that I teach Sandburg and Amy Lowell about as enthusiastically as I do Robinson and Millay, and that I watch eagerly for "new lights." Last night we had a good time with French Symbolism, including Henri De Regnier's "The Vase," a lovely poem. I wonder, by the way, if it wasn't the inspiration for Amy Lowell's "The Shadow," which I also admire. But I think that much of the experimentation is being accorded space that might better go to more articulate, if not more conventional, work.

All art exists, of course, to express the otherwise inexpressible, to communicate the otherwise incommunicable. Insofar as the "new" verse conveys significant thoughts or emotions, it deserves space, but when it chiefly tantalizes or baffles the reader (and may have been meant to do just that), does it deserve **patronage?** If numerous readers and potential readers of poetry feel deprived and want to voice their protests and their desires, I should say that they have every right to do so, singly or in groups. I am reminded of the reply of that fine poet, Edwin Arlington Robinson, when asked whether he wrote free verse. Robinson said "No, I write badly enough as it is."

Cecil B. Williams,
De Paul University.

"This isn't exactly free verse", apologized artist James Montgomery Flagg, "but it is very inexpensive."

THE NEWS LETTER

Editor
BURGES JOHNSON

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Editorial

General as well as specific suggestions for post-war English teaching, which have appeared in these columns and in many others, dwell upon the broad fields of knowledge covered by the familiar catalog term, "ENGLISH". Much of the liberal arts curriculum might, without impropriety, be classified under that title. History, Philosophy, Economics, Political Science, Appreciation of the Arts, Journalism, Comparative Literature, Religion, might all be taught in the English classroom, and frequently are. In fact, if they are too much neglected in that classroom, then English is inadequately taught!

Why, then, do we English teachers discuss so little in our councils the narrow limits of our own training to meet such an academic demand? In too many colleges throughout our land the requirements of an "English major" emphasize the minimum number of English courses which he **must** take in order to qualify as a major, without specifying the maximum. In too many colleges it is possible for an English major to graduate and enter the profession of English teaching with almost nothing in his educational background but a lot of English courses and training in composition, which may have been taught as nothing more than a technique. In other words, he may go out into teaching with as narrowly trained a mind as his alma mater can provide.

If there is such close kinship between Philosophy and History and Political Science and the English Department, then those subjects if taught in the proper spirit and with the use of texts which rank as literature, might well be credited as "English" toward the training of an English major. At least this assertion deserves full discussion! Of course such procedure would mean less routine, less red tape in the Dean's office, and more exceptions in individual cases,—consequently more trouble in the college offices. The teacher would have to include in his training more studies which he dislikes. Only the student might profit. But the student pays the bills.

This issue of our Pillar of Pedagogical Perspicacity is dated February-March in the hope that thus we may more successfully synchronize with the calendar. But the Volume and Number are correctly recorded; and subscribers will not be cheated of an issue, because one more than usual will appear in the summer-time.

Your editor, incidentally, will have returned from his southwestern jaunt before the April issue appears; and welcomes your contributions at the old address—if you can spell Schenectady.

Gleaned From the Mail

Dear Editor:

The remarks of L. G. Painter on owls tempt me to comment. Surely whether one finds an owl cheerful or not is a matter of purely personal feeling. Traditionally owls are sad fellows, and most of us at one time or another have heard the tradition. But classically they are the bird associated with the goddess of wisdom. Those who are strongly under classical influence, or have emotionally escaped both popular tradition and classics alike, may find them cheerful if they first heard them under cheerful circumstances.

Speaking of tradition there is a strong one that Mr. Poe first conceived of his Raven as an owl, the bird of Pallas; one of his closest friends in Philadelphia, Henry B. Hirst, kept a pet shop, and perhaps acquaintance with an owl or two may have convinced the poet that owls were not gloomy enough for his far from cheerful poem.

My humorous tone in this note should not be taken for a contemptuous dismissal of the problem. In all writing the subtlest problem is perhaps the connotation any word or allusion will bring up in the mind of a reader. But when we come to such natural phenomena as the songs of birds, I think a writer has a right to express what he thinks on the subject—as Wordsworth took the song of the cuckoo, that most immoral, and in folklore, most mocking, of birds, as a cheerful sign of spring. Science by the way, probably is on the side of the cheerful interpretation. There is no reason to suppose that the owl or cuckoo when singing is other than cheerful, and the feathered females addressed may be presumed, in a primitive way, to regard the notes as charming expressions of regard. A born city dweller, I found the song of the mocking bird in Missouri cheerful enough—for all that I recalled a gloomy song about Hallie, on whose grave those birds were said to sing. And the Ravens at the Tower of London struck me as lordly, but not at all lugubrious though I certainly observed them with prejudiced eyes. In any work of art, I am resolved to accept a bird as the artist sees him—provided of course he makes it clear how he feels about it.

T. O. Mabbott,
Hunter College.

Dear Editor:

Reading the two comments in the December NEWS LETTER concerning those sentences taken from letters allegedly written by wives of men in service reminds me that I have a flock of clippings presenting these same sentences in various forms. I know they date from World War I; I've suspected that the origin was older. As Mr. Hasley says, perhaps they should be regarded as incipient folk-literature.

M. J. Meredith,
Univ. of Nebraska.

Dear Editor:

May I add to Father Albertson's extract from THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY my favorite quotation from Cardinal Newman?

"A university is, according to the usual designation, an alma mater, not a foundry, or a mint, or a treadmill."

H. S. Ficke,
Univ. of Dubuque.

Dear Editor:

No longer am I the only person to use visual aids in teaching college English! Your first article in the current **Newsletter** gives me great satisfaction, for I have been painfully manufacturing slides and films, amid superior and disapproving colleagues, for severeal years. The Dore illustrations for the **Bible, Paradise Lost,** and **Don Quixote** are a decided stimulus to student interest, for example.

I wonder if many instructors know of the recordings of **Beowulf** and of Chaucer put out by the N.C.T.E. They are supplied with pamphlets also that may be in the students' hands as the records are played — with the Anglo-Saxon, that is a decided advantage, for the translation is interlinear.

Did you note that I am quoted as having said that English teachers are **paid** not to teach history? **Said** was of course the word intended. Indignant teachers may then hurry to read the original article, if they read that far in my recital.

I hope you are not really intending to give up the editorship. Live persons are not often discovered, and one is needed here.

A. V. Hall,
Univ. of Washington.

More About the "Isms"

I was especially interested in Professor Werner's "Help! Where Am I?" As the regular teacher of our courses in modern American literature and now of "Masterpieces of World Literature," I have often wondered about the literary "isms" and periods. Compartments are fine when things will stay in them, but "Something there is that doesn't love a wall."

In World Literature we are using Addison Hibbard's **Writers of the Western World,** where writers and writings are neatly arranged in three main "tempers," with enough subdivisions to give us seven "tempers" in all. Students are having the time of their lives (so far as I can judge) in the course, but they admit bewilderment at finding, for instance, that Boccaccio was a romantic and Chaucer a realist when they both told the tale of poor Griselda in the same age and in much the same way. They had their difficulties too with romantic Ovid, consorting as he did with his classical contemporaries Virgil and Horace. Of course this all gave me the better opportunity to teach them what little I have learned about literary isms, trends, and tendencies.

In American literature too we have our perplexities. Critics insist that the realism of Howells and James dominates the 70's, 80's, and 90's, but I am convinced that romantic novels were being more widely sold and read almost every year of the period than the realistic ones. I admit that the "realistic" approach of Howells, **et al.,** was significant, but was it dominant?

I am inclined to accept Professor Werner's No. 4 theory, "That there really has been no Realistic Period but that we are still in the Romantic Period." Since Wordsworth and Coleridge, and the rise of political democracy, writers have sought new subject matter and new methods of expression more than they have looked back to Homer's store of theme and rule. Realism and all the later isms have this seeking in common with romanticism. Perhaps after all we have had but two tempers, with romanticism dominant since Coleridge took up the critical scepter that the great Johnson had laid down. Classicism has been intermittently present but never dominant since.

Cecil B. Williams,
DePaul University.

The Rhymster

No hole upon the golf links have I done—in one;
No pipe or horn (of sorts musicians know)—I blow.
Despite these snow-train ads I could forgo—the snow.
I cannot see why athletes jump or run—for fun;
My training as a boxer or a fencer is yet un—begun,
I catch no fishes swimming to and fro—Ah, no!
And always on a yacht myself I stow—below,—
In fact there's nothing active neath the sun—I've done.
Some people find a harp or flute, and play—all day,
And some prefer, when business sets them free—to ski
While mountains in the pleasant summer time—some climb.
But I am old; from all such stunts I stay—away.
From any sort of exercise I see—I flee,
And take my fountain pen in hand and rhyme—like time.

What Then?

The other day, as comment on an especially flowery, jargon-filled freshman theme, I wrote merely "See First Corinthians 14:9," the verse that, you remember, Gelett Burgess uses at the head of **Short Words Are Words of Might:** "Except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air." Duly the freshman writer returned his theme, which now bore, under my own, this note: "Dear Prof., I don't mean to be rude, but see First Corinthians 14:38."

Dartmouth College.

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A Problem of Etiquette

If left to themselves it is doubtful if many of our first-year students would voluntarily scrape acquaintance with such formidable personages as Shakespeare or Milton or Wordsworth whom they now meet because they can not escape the invitation. Such a social situation is at best a strain upon etiquette even if the appointments are beyond reproach, and the host is a rare fellow if he can put the company at ease.

He is especially aware of two hazards: the student may be so overwhelmed with the reputation of the guest that he will sit off in the corner and contribute only haltingly, if at all, to the conversation; or, unimpressed by the accomplishments of the distinguished visitor, he will talk out of turn, commit **faux pas** in cheerful ignorance, or shift the discussion to another subject.

I used to think that the greater hazard was being overwhelmed by reputation, and I tried my best to put the student at ease by reminding him—since the guest could not overhear—that the man he was about to meet was once inconspicuous, that he had made many mistakes, that the critics were sometimes wrong about him, that his accomplishments were still open to review, and that, conceivably, his position in the world of letters might be subject to change. I suggested that even now the guest might be grateful for renewed appreciation or a fresher understanding, and that the keenest discourtesy one could do him would be to assume his influence to be over and done with. "Suppose this man," I would say, "were to submit a story, an essay, or a poem to you as editor without the magic of his name. How could you judge his anonymous contribution? Do you think you could stand up to your unknown contributor with confident and independent judgment?" Or I would ask my students to remember that this man's books were at one time manuscript — sometimes rejected manuscript — and that if he had known that what came out of his ink bottle would some day be used for material to frame examination questions, he might have untimely dashed his head against the wall. With remarks like these I would try to counter the unnerving glory of great names.

But now I think the second hazard is the greater. Now I am troubled with too many students who have little regard for the great man they have the honor to meet. Although they have already been told of the occasion, although some of his books have already been mentioned, they seem unaware of the identity of the guest. They do not catch his name, or they mispronounce it, or, left to themselves, they can not spell it. They are not quite sure just why he is considered to be worth meeting, although they are amiably willing to take the host's word for it. Instead of trying modestly to inform themselves about the guest with a few discreet inquiries, they burst out with embarrassing questions, asking Longfellow why he was a barefoot boy or Keats why he wanted to free the Greeks. A good host can deal with such awkward moments as these, but the situation really becomes almost unmanageable when it is apparent that the achievements of the guest have little weight in affecting the discussion. It does not occur to the students that they are in the presence of a man who has done something of note, that a distinguished record has been made, that an interesting life has been lived,—and that the burden of proof is on them, so to speak, to show cause why they should not respond. No, they would be pleased to change the subject and talk about other things, or, if they do respond, they deliver judgments without possessing a basis for judgment.

A tale is told of a tourist who, after storming into an art gallery and out again in about five minutes flat, remarked to an attendant, "Why should I bother about such stuff?" The attendant quietly replied, "These pictures are no longer on trial. The people who come to see them are."

Admitting that there is a certain danger in accepting reputation with few questions asked, I submit that there is a greater danger in encouraging students to judge and criticize before they study, investigate, and master the facts out of which to make their pronouncements. I would like to see a little humility in our class rooms—just a little, not too much. I am not discouraged about this matter, believing that good social situations in our class rooms are not uncommon. After all, I have been talking about two extremes, two hazards which happily do not apply to the great general response.

Harold Blodgett,
Union College.

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Science, Education, And Democracy

Despite our steadily increasing geological and biological knowledge, Mr. Colton F. Barrows thoughtfully reminds us, our global ocean still holds many unplumbed mysteries (**Nat. Geog., Jan.**). In its science review for 1944, the **Science News Letter** (Dec. 23) assigns top billing to jet-propulsion, rocket bombs, DDT, and the B-29 Superfortress. Julian Huxley, investigating West African possibilities, exclaims over the physical, political, and cultural needs of this unbelievably varied but deplorably backward country (**Yale Rev.**, Winter, 1944). Harlow Shapley provides us with "A Design for Fighting": War is invigorating, but, against men, is indefensible; why not, then, fight gloriously against Illiteracy, Premature Senility, Cultural Uniformity, and the Tyranny of the Unknown? (**American Scholar**, Winter, 1944) Science itself, recommends Jacques Barzun, needs to be taught, not as technical drudgery, but humanistically (**Atlantic**, Jan.).

Alexander Meiklejohn agrees with John Dewey (**Fortune**, Jan.) that education lacks unity of aim, material, and method, and that it should convey understanding of the present; maintaining that the liberal arts colleges also introduce their students to the sciences and do not dissociate facts from values, he recommends that the futile controversy cease. Comprehensive values, exercising rationality and sympathy, can produce the mature humanity essential to democracy; these values will come through revitalized study of man's highest achievements, says Warren Beck in the December **English Journal**. Both the direct and the indirect approaches must be utilized, adds Burton P. Fowler (**Yale Rev.**, Winter, 1945), for our leaders will come from not the intellectually gifted alone; promising trends are the broad-fields, culture-epoch, and corecurriculum types. "Let's Teach Composition," cries Edward W. Hamilton; give students practice in picking out, comparing, and evaluating specifc **ideas** (**Eng. Jour.**, Dec.). Ralph Barton Perry recalls the puritan, "The Moral Athlete," who although he trained his will in brute strength rather than in skills, accumulated valuable spiritual reserves (**SRL**, Dec. 30). Bettina Linn prophesies that novelists of the new age, indulging less in portrayals of violence and of sex, will have a great sense of human dignity and of the relation between man and the universe, more faith in orderly experience (**Yale Rev.**).

The ancient art of Athens is photographed by **Life** (Jan. 1 and 8). In the issue of December 18, Teddy White stated that in Northern China Communist-led groups practice democracy, and war against the Japanese. Owen Lattimore, ruefully admitting that the Japanese have outsmarted us with our own economic weapons, inquires what policy America is really intending to pursue (**Atlantic**, Jan.). In Germany, the only alternative to renewed Nazism, says Heinz Eulan (**New Rep.**, Dec. 25) is socialization of the entire German economy.

Ex-Premier Juan Negrin breaks his long silence with the hope that Republican Spain, the first belligerent in this war, will yet recover its strength and tolerance (**Nation**, Jan. 6).

Because America stands for freedom under law, concludes Joseph H. Ball, she must democratically utilize good government in increasing individual freedom of initiative (**Vital Sp.**, Dec. 15). The **U. S. News** (Dec. 29) has a "Blueprint for 60,000 Jobs," with federal spending as the keystone. Opening of the whole Great Lakes region to direct ocean-going traffic, if the St. Lawrence Seaway and Power Development bill is not defeated by railroad and private-power opposition, will promote post-war prosperity (**New Rep.**, Jan. 8). Max Lerner (**Am. Scholar**) reiterates that world prosperity depends upon world trade, which today necessitates an economic pattern directed towards production, and Sumner Welles (**SRL**, Dec. 23) warns that the fate of international organization, and of the entire world, will depend on how the **people** of the United States cooperate with the other great peoples of the world.

Few know of the educational work of WRUL since 1935 ("The Radio University in Peace and War," **Am. Scholar**). This nonprofit station, supported by voluntary contributions, is already doing much to win good will for America, and can do more. Another good radio program, the University of Chicago Round Table, (No. 353) stresses once more the present need for high moral and intellectual, rather than materialistic, goals. These programs reach the people, and may have wide reverberations.

A. V. Hall,
Univ. of Washington.

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